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A Comparison of the Entrance Examinations for Post-graduate Music Education at Selected Estonian and Finnish Universities

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Abstract

The primary goal of music teacher education programs is to produce good teachers for schools and how to identify them through entrance examinations. This study examines the kind of entrance examinations in place at the masters' level in music education in Estonian and Finnish universities, and the similarities or differences between these examinations. In this study, the aims, content, focus areas, and the background philosophy of the entrance examinations are compared and discussed. Similarities identified include testing of aptitude to become a music teacher, practical musicianship, singing, playing different instruments, music theory and solfège. The main differences revealed that in Estonia there are two entrance examinations (Bachelor and Master level) and a teaching session for candidates is not required. What is most challenging to evaluate is the pedagogical motivation because the entrance examination cannot assess long-term motivation, commitment required to teach music or reacting in problem situations.

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1. Introduction

This is a comparative study and discussion about music education entrance examinations in post-graduate studies. In this study the aims, content, focus areas and background philosophy of the entrance examinations of two neighbouring countries are compared and discussed through content analysis and interviews concerning the entrance examinations for post-graduate music education in Estonia and Finland.

Those who administer the teacher education programmes need to examine critically their admission criteria to ensure that those criteria, along with the preparation they provide, will lead to their graduates' success as beginning teachers (Casey & Childs, 2007; Ruismäki & Juvonen, 2005; Juvonen & Ruismäki, 2008). There are many challenges identified in music teaching in schools such as teachers' competence, lack of resources or the low priority or time given to music in schools nowadays in many countries. The primary goal of (music) teacher education programmes is to produce good (music) teachers for elementary and secondary schools (Lewis, Parsad, Carey, Bartfai, Farris, Smerdon, & Greene, 1999; Russell-Bowie, 2009).

The admission processes for these programmes are expected to select applicants who will succeed in the preparatory programmes and become good teachers. According to research in this area, there is no consensus on what factors enhance general teacher quality. Is knowledge of subject matter the most important aspect of teaching (knowledge) or is good teaching more aligned with personality traits and characteristics (skills/attitudes) (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Stronge, 2007; Casey & Childs, 2007; Harris & Sass, 2011)

As each university in Estonia and Finland has its own demands for entrance examination, this study focuses on identifying the differences as well as the similarities in these entrance examinations between the countries and the universities. The other aim is to discuss if there are any specific focus areas that make a difference in becoming a music teacher. The future challenges of the entrance examinations are also discussed from the point of view of the changing needs in the learning environments and school work.

2. Theoretical background

Music, without a doubt, plays an extremely important role in the lives of most members of society, especially for youngsters in every culture. Music affects their social identities, expresses their cultural heritage and the influences of globalization and mobilization, as well as their experiences and knowledge of the diversity of musical tastes and traditions. Therefore, the selection and education of music teachers should be discussed, re-thought and re-imagined (Aróstegui, 2011)

with due respect to the pivotal role that these teachers play in the psychosocial development of youth.

Toom (2017) introduces four important issues when evaluating and assessing teacher education. Firstly, there are characteristics of the teacher profession and work. Teachers' work is both knowledge-intensive, expert work and demanding, interactive work in changing contexts with diverse pupils and families. Work contexts are also changing and digitalization challenges teachers in their work (Deed, 2017). Secondly, not only must music teachers' knowledge, skills and competencies be developed but their own musical giftedness and skills must also be improved throughout their careers. These issues are challenging with regard to entrance examinations, teacher education and the development of teacher education and teacher educators.

Teacher competence is the major factor influencing student learning and the most important task of teacher education is to support learning to teach throughout the career in changing environments (Ilomäki, Lakkala, Toom, & Muukkonen, 2017). According to Husu and Toom (2016), Finnish academic teacher education provides a solid basis for teachers' work, although in-service teacher education requires significant developments; it is also necessary to develop teacher education in a research-based manner. When focusing on the entrance examination of music teacher education, student candidates' teaching competence and musical giftedness are both essential. In Finland, the quality of teachers is one of the most frequently cited factors explaining the quality of the education system; the same concerns are also expressed about the Estonian educational system, which has attained especially high levels in the recent PISA 2015 results. In addition, Estonia is known as a singing culture with world famous Singing Festivals and school choirs.

Music educational studies (instrument teaching) began at the Sibelius Academy, Finland in 1882. Later, school music teacher education was instituted at Sibelius Academy in the 1950s. The second university to educate school music teachers was the University of Jyväskylä in 1982. This was followed by the University of Oulu which established its music teacher education programme in 1993. All three institutions share the responsibility for music teacher education in Finland. (Juvonen & Ruismäki, 2008).

Music teacher training in Estonia began in 1923, when a class for secondary school teachers of voice and music was opened at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT). It was then called Tallinn Highest Music School and it existed until 1950. Due to different political decisions, the training of music teachers was begun as a combined speciality in 1955 at Tallinn Pedagogical Institute. As the learning environment for future music teachers was thought to be better in musical surroundings, music teacher training was transferred to Tallinn State Conservatory (at present

EAMT) in 1971; the duration of the music teacher training was five years. Since then, music teacher training has been one of the specialities taught in EAMT.

At Tallinn University (TLU), music teacher training programmes were established in 2001, while at Tartu University Viljandi Cultural Academy (TU VCA), music teacher training programmes were opened first at the bachelor's level in 2007 and master's level in 2009. For optimization purposes, universities have been pressured to open joint curricula at the master's level. As a result, in 2013-2016 the joint curriculum of music pedagogy was organised between EAMT and TU VCA. In 2016, the music teacher joint curriculum (master's level) in EAMT and TLU was established.

During the Bologna process, from 2003-2006, teacher education programmes, as with all the other university degree programmes, were developed in line with the two-tier system using the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and modularization in both Estonia and Finland (Jakku-Sihvonen, Tissari, Ots, & Uusiautti, 2012). Currently, teacher education in Finland is a highly competitive field of masters' degree university studies and is provided in universities across the country. Students are carefully selected through two-phase entrance exams that emphasise both general and subject teaching skills and in music, especially musical skills (Malinen, Väisänen & Savolainen, 2012; Tirri, 2014).

The authorities in charge of entrance examinations need to decide how they will evaluate the musical giftedness and skills of the applicants. There is no one model but usually the evaluation is done according to the performance-based exam in every university. In some universities, musical aptitude tests have also been used (e.g., Karma's test in Finland). Haroutounian (2000) presents an interesting and innovative model, "Talent beyond words" in which three areas of identification are presented. Firstly, musical skills are evaluated; this category includes evaluation of rhythm, perception of sound and coordination. The second area is motivation, where enthusiasm, ability to focus and perseverance are evaluated. The third area is creativity where expressiveness and improvisation and composition skills are assessed. According to Lancaster (2003), this model could have implications on uncovering both academic and artistic talents.

3. Purpose of Study

As the ultimate purpose of any education programme is to ensure that good (music) teachers for elementary and secondary schools are produced, our focus in this paper is to analyze describe the entrance examinations for music education programmes in Finnish and Estonian universities that educate music teachers in terms of the similarities or differences (if any) between the two neighbouring countries or among the different universities. It has already been mentioned earlier

that those who administer the teacher education programmes need to examine critically their admission criteria to ensure that those criteria, along with the preparation they provide, will lead to their graduates' success as beginning teachers (Casey & Childs, 2007; Ruismäki & Juvonen, 2005; Juvonen & Ruismäki, 2008). Hence, the admission processes for these programmes are expected to select applicants who will succeed in the preparatory programmes and become good teachers.

4. Research methods

In this study, we undertook a content analysis of the entrance examinations for music education programmes of five institutions in total. Three are from Finland: The University of the Arts Helsinki/Sibelius Academy, the University of Jyväskylä and the University of Oulu. Two are from Estonia; the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre/University of Tallinn (joint curricula) and the University of Tartu. The content analysis comprised a comparison of the content, focus areas and background philosophy. In Finland, at two universities (Eastern Finland University and the University of Turku) it is possible to study 35cp of music education and acquire a qualification to teach music at the secondary school level but the entrance examinations for these study programmes were not analysed in this comparison because these study programmes are offered to students who are already in their teacher education programmes.

In 2017, data was collected from various institutions' entrance examination guidebooks (both written handbooks and on websites), analysed, described and compared for differences and similarities. Furthermore, two professors, one from Finland and one from Estonia, were interviewed about their experiences and perceptions as well as challenges concerning the entrance exams. The aim of the interviews was to discover their observations regarding the entrance examinations in last few years and the main challenges for these exams in the future. It was felt that the interview responses would help to provide supplementary information on the veracity of the entrance exams, thereby, validating the study purpose.

5. Results

In the results, first the entrance exams of the different universities and two countries are presented; next, similarities and different emphases are discussed. The Sibelius Academy (University of the Arts) offers two kinds of master's degree programmes and here the first one is discussed. The first and most common programme consists of five and one-half years of education leading to first a bachelor's and then a master's degree. The 5.5-year programmes (3 years + 2.5

years) are intended for applicants who have completed the Finnish matriculation examination or have a corresponding international qualification. The other option students can choose is a 2.5-year education programme leading only to a Master's degree. The 2.5-year curriculum is intended for applicants with a bachelor's degree or equivalent who wish to study further at the master's level. In the Sibelius Academy, they use the preliminary essay for choosing the students who will sit for the preliminary exam, which consists of music theory, history and writing skills. There are two sections in the entrance exam: singing and playing different instruments; solfège, improvisation and musicianship skills are also evaluated. The second section consists of singing and playing different instruments and styles, and more music theory and solfège skills are tested. In addition, interaction skills are evaluated in a group discussion and teaching skills in a small class teaching situation. In the second section, voice control is considered and at the end there is a final evaluation of the preliminary essay. The parts of the entrance examination are weighted so that they affect the sum scores as follows: I section: 25%; II section: 1. instrument 12.5%; 2. instrument or 3. Instrument 7.5 %; teaching situation 25%; group discussion 10%; music theory and solfège 10%, and essay 10%.

In Jyväskylä, there are also two sections in the entrance exams and preliminary points from school success and previous music studies are allotted; furthermore, there is a unique practice of administering a psychological evaluation. Background points (papers and earlier examinations) are given a maximum of 20% of the examination points. The first section is worth a maximum of 48% and consists of three parts. Part A is piano playing, singing, second instrument 24%, while part B covers guitar playing (8%) and free accompaniment, improvisation (8%). Part C is all Solfeggio testing (8%). In the second section, the knowledge of music history and styles is evaluated (10%). Cooperation abilities are evaluated in a group test (10%) and personality is assessed in a personal interview and with a psychological test (12%).

The University of Oulu, entrance examination also has two sections. The first section consists of free accompaniment by piano (20%) and solfège (10%). The second section consists of group discussion and an interview (25%), musicianship skills (15%), music theory and writing skills (15%) and instrumental skills (15%).

The vision of the ideal student for music teacher education seems to be quite equal in all the universities studied in terms of the assessment emphasis of the exams, which has remained significantly unaltered in recent years. The University of Jyväskylä emphasises the background points before the entrance examination the most. All Finnish Universities have two sections in their entrance examinations. The University of the Arts/Sibelius Academy has recently added a writing an essay before the entrance exams.

In Estonia, there also are several pathways to study to become a music teacher. A bachelor's degree in music education can be achieved at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and a bachelor's degree in integrated arts, music and media can be acquired at the University of Tallinn. Specialised Vocational Education (4 years) is organized by the University of Tartu. From all these bachelor's studies programmes, it is possible to go on to the entrance examinations at the master's level. In Estonia, there are different entrance examinations for the bachelor's level and the master's level. The master's programme, Music Education, is organized as a joint curriculum between the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and the University of Tallinn. Upon completion of this programme, music teachers will then have a Master's degree in education. There is also an integrated Master of Arts programme (music teacher specialisation at the University of Tartu).

The entrance examination of the joint curricula between the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and the University of Tallinn consists of a musical test (maximum of 70 points); an interview (maximum of 15 points) and a vocational aptitude test (maximum of 15 points); the minimum number of points to enter the master's programme is 75. The entrance examination test consists of an A cappella song (candidate's own choice), accompaniment of a song (candidate's own choice from school music books, performed with melody), piano accompaniment for a song (given by the entrance commission; melody + harmony, without singing along), an instrumental piece of music on any musical instrument, demonstrating the candidate's best instrument playing ability and a music theory test. All applicants are interviewed on themes of music and culture in general and especially at master's level entrance examination. During the interview, possible research themes are also discussed. The aim of this vocational aptitude evaluation is to determine the candidate's potential to work as a teacher, especially his or her communication and self-expression skills, language skills (native and foreign languages), IT skills and readiness for teamwork and further professional development.

When comparing the entrance examinations of these different universities, many similarities can be found. Firstly, and naturally, the entrance examinations in all universities are based on the university laws and statutes together with the regulations of each university in both Estonia and Finland. All the universities follow the basics of the entrance examinations, where, the entrance examinations are usually estimated by entrance juries that concentrate on estimating the candidates' different areas of musical skills and abilities. University entrance examinations have been generally researched significantly; the main results show that up to 25% of an individual's future educational success can be explained with factors that are observable at the time of admission (Malinen, Väisänen, & Savolainen, 2012).

In all universities, students are evaluated according to their musical skills and suitability to become teachers. Similarities found in the entrance examinations of all the studied universities were the evaluations in the fields of: aptitude for being a music teacher (interview), practical musicianship (free accompaniment), singing and playing different instruments, music theory and solfège.

However, some differences between Finland and Estonia were found, the most significant being that Estonian universities applied two-phase entrance examinations, first to the bachelor's level and after that to the master's level. In Estonia, there was no teaching session for the bachelor-level examination. In Finland, on the other hand, entrance exams are only used for those applying for a master's degree (including bachelor level). In Estonia, the joint curriculum between the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and the University of Tallinn or University of Tartu has been developed for only for master's level studies.

A different emphasis was also found between Estonia and Finland, where, in Finland, the University of the Arts Helsinki/Sibelius Academy emphasizes mostly on general and classical music skills, while at the University of Jyväskylä, the emphasis is more holistic in general, focusing on the candidate's psychological and educational capacity and musical skills. At the University of Oulu, practical musical skills are valued. Overall, in Finland, scientific writing skills are also evaluated.

In Estonia, at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, music theory and classical music skills, especially choir conducting skills, are valued. The University of Tallinn also evaluated more theoretical skills and the University of Tartu emphasized more practical music skills.

According to the comparative analysis, the entrance examinations of the three universities in Finland are quite similar. All three universities typically use typically two-part examinations in which the candidates are rated after the first part; after which, the best of them are called for the other part of the examination. The emphasis of the sections seems to differ significantly among the three universities, but a thorough examination shows that the entrance examinations broadly measure and estimate the same qualities. The clearest difference seems to be that the University of Jyväskylä also gives candidates points based on their application papers. The examinations have been planned in all the units by professional music educators and their points of view are seen in focusing on the percentages of the exams. Vocational aptitude for school teaching, musicianship and educability are the qualities that are tested in entrance examinations of all the universities; these qualities may be placed in different parts of the examinations or described in different terms.

According to the professors who were interviewed, universities have found their entrance examinations to be very appropriate although the relationship between the entrance examination

and the success of students' studies has not been followed systematically in any of the units. According to the professors, the evaluators are willing to develop, speculate and improve the exams every year. The Estonian professor familiar with the process noted:

We improve entrance examinations when there is need for that. Lately, we added a sight-reading task to see how many musical information candidates could proceed and present directly. This information is important for monitoring students' previous studies, helping educators to plan applicable tasks for students in curricula and predict future practice time.

The professor from Finland added:

In the future, such qualified music teachers who master, for example, two or more subjects in comprehensive and upper-secondary schools, may be asked to be music teachers in a school. Getting a job could be easier for them. On the other hand, it would be desirable for a music teacher to be able to teach bands, choirs, music technology or other musical activities in different institutions. These aspects could also be measured in entrance examinations.

There seems to be some level of pressure in every university to lighten the examinations; especially in Finland, there is a push to enable candidates to complete the exam in one day for economic reasons. In this area, the choice of using only matriculation examination grades is impossible because it tells nothing about musical skills or vocational aptitude. The Estonian professor suggests

Lightening the entrance exams is a very good suggestion for two reasons. Firstly, there are many university programmes where students can enter with upper-secondary state exams results (i.e., natural sciences). The student fills the application in a web-based system and according to this application she/he will receive an acceptance or rejection. In the music field, this system is not appropriate because the academic level is not so relevant in music or arts. Secondly, in the Estonian case, the teachers' profession is rather "less-paid" than "well-paid". Hence, many young people do not want to become teachers. Therefore, universities feel pressure to accept every student who has shown interest despite his or her musical talent or intellectual level. We have to keep in mind that the music teacher's profession demands skills that have been practised for many years (i.e., instrumental training). Learning an instrument often begins even before school, so we have to seek advanced, skillful students even if there are not many of them.

The Estonian professor advised

It is critically important to meet every student on an entrance exam because important information is received not only by mandatory tasks—musical or intellectual activities—but via communication: introduction, self-representation and self-realisations as well as managing in stressful situations.

Similarly, the Finnish professor noted that

The success in the matriculation examination often predicts success in academic studies, which naturally is good. However, without the musical skills, motivations, without a long-term motivation particularly to direct and support pupils, the teacher will find it difficult to be satisfied and feel that the work is meaningful. These qualities or tendencies should also be measured better in the entrance examinations. The importance of selection tests in career selection will continue to be very important so they should be thoroughly invested.

According to the professors interviewed, it is difficult to evaluate long-term motivation, commitment to music teacher's work or reactions in problem situations in the entrance examination. The Estonian professor related some observations

We have seen that students with good results in entrance examination could not manage so well in intensive and time-consuming studies. I guess the reason is that we do not know precisely the quality of students' previous studies. Therefore, we have to find the ways to get to know candidates' potential to manage in challenging situations.

Finally, the Finnish professor noted

Teaching is a very personal matter, and every student should be supported to find his or her own strengths and philosophy of teaching. In the current techno-economic society, the 'soul' of humanism and art should also be found.

After the 1990s, more educational and psychological expertise in the juries has been added in the personal interviews. In addition, the practical musician skills in other music genres are now more valued along with classical musician skills and music theory. In Finland, music pedagogues for instrumental teaching are also educated in polytechnic universities and some of them are willing to continue their studies on the university level to become school music teachers.

When speculating about the demands for a music teacher in today's schools and especially in the future, the professors highlighted the importance of music for the well-being of pupils. Music teachers have a specific role in developing pupils' attitude, interest and engagement in learning music. The Estonian professor had much to say on this topic

The music teacher should cope with various tasks: teaching music lessons, leading choirs and ensembles as well as pop- and rhythm-music bands. A most challenging issue in educating future music teachers is to prepare them for "modern complexity". The teacher should be good enough in various fields. Our problem is how to fit everything that is needed into a teacher training curriculum. That leads us to the question: what is relevant in music education? In our case, it is the

power of singing that brings us together every five years, what makes us feel as one nation. The first Song Celebration took place in 1869, and the singing revolution in the 1990s. Taking this into consideration, we find that in school, it is vital that music as an art domain gives an opportunity for students to develop their own personalities, including social skills, creative thinking, teamwork besides musical knowledge and skills. To put it briefly, the teaching-learning process should be focused on the students' well-being in both the present and the future.

When asking the professors their opinion about developing the entrance examination for the future, the Estonian professor emphasized the candidates' personality and social skills by answering

It is important to know candidates' teamwork skills and personal characteristics, which will become essential in the teachers' profession. The teacher's personality has a powerful influence on pupils' personal development.

On the other hand, the Finnish professor suggested

In Finland, every university that educates music teachers has a lot in common with the others, but each one also its own specialties. These emphases have historical traditions. I do not believe in making any dramatic changes in the entrance examinations. Though, each unit monitors changes in society, music education and learning and reacts as much as possible.

There are many challenges when developing the entrance examinations for music teachers. According to the professors, high level musical skills together with social skills and motivation as well as knowledge of music pedagogy will also be the key elements to be evaluated in the future.

6. Conclusion and discussion

The changes in society and in music (see also, Elliot, 1995, 1996; Elliott & Silverman, 2014; Regelski, 1996; Swanwick, 1996) have influenced entrance examinations when they have been strong enough. In order to develop future entrance examinations, it is important to consider what characteristics are essential and which can be taught in the curriculum. Those preparing the entrance examination need to decide how much value is placed on musical giftedness and skills and how much on the attitude and motivation for school work and teaching. However, it appears that the emphasis on free accompaniment has increased recently in the entrance exams.

The knowledge of music technology and awareness of informal learning environments and digitalisation in music will be emphasised in the future and should be developed in teacher education as well as entrance exams. Furthermore, the ability to teach (measured in the teaching section of the exams) is also important, but it is interesting to follow how this area will be evaluated

in the future. From that point of view, it is difficult to compare the contents and foci of the entrance examinations using only the percentages of emphases without observing all entrance exam situations.

All the authors involved in preparing this article have some experience in evaluating the entrance examinations which allows for an in-depth overview of the veracity of the exams. In addition, two professors were interviewed to learn about their experiences and thoughts on future challenges to developing successful entrance examinations for selecting the best music teachers for the future. All this underscores the importance of investigating the relationship between the quality of the entrance exams and the stated aim of producing good (music) teachers.

Deeper and more detailed studies should be conducted especially concerning the evaluation process and models. How universities can find the best student teachers is an important concern. The reputation of a university is perhaps one of the most controversial issues and arguably, all these universities in this study are among the best in the world that offer music educational studies. According to Dill and Soo (2005), the entrance examinations are crucial for any university because the good candidates are weighted even more in their formula of university quality compared to the faculty: 20% or 17%, respectively. It can also be argued that if a university can attract the best national or international students, it must be a good one. Hence, it is a certainty that, in the case of music education, entrance examinations tests are good predictors of performance of musical skills and academic success. In the pursuit of more effective entrance exams for educational programmes for any discipline, ongoing research is crucial to identify more reliable and valid assessment methods of non-cognitive characteristics which are essential in applicants for (music) teacher education programmes.

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